

## MEMBERSHIP AND THE NORM OF DISCIPLINE IN THE *IGLESIA NI KRISTO* \*

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This article will be concerned with only two aspects of the *Iglesia Ni Kristo*; namely, the growth of membership and the norm of discipline. In these passages the chief focus is upon the forms of social interaction which are found in these two phases of the *Iglesia's* activities.

### The Spiritual Wealth of the *Iglesia*

After the turmoil of World War II had quieted down the *Iglesia* resumed its mission work. As months passed their work gathered momentum reaching its peak in 1950 when the conservative estimate of the members of the *Iglesia* was 100,000.<sup>1</sup> According to the central office the total membership for the same year was 2,000,000.<sup>2</sup> Basing our calculation on these figures, they number more than two million now. However, responsible *Iglesia* ministers and members cannot furnish the author with the necessary statistics to support their claim because of Manalo's desire to abstain from publicity and vainglory. Such a desire is partly caused by the malicious and often unjust publicity directed toward Manalo himself and the doctrines of the *Iglesia*. Most people outside the *Iglesia's* fold are skeptical about this number. Many believe that they do not number over 200,000.

The author is more inclined to believe that the *Iglesia's* active and ordinary members number close to 200,000 or a little more. Active members are those who try to win people over to their side at every opportunity afforded them. They always attend open forums and religious rallies held by the church. The ordinary members are like many ordinary members of other churches since they keep alone to themselves, do not always participate actively in the *Iglesia's* activities and are not particularly interested whether their church wins more converts or not. Added to the ordinary members are the children.

Let us make a closer scrutiny of the membership of the *Iglesia*. In 1948 the Bureau of Census and Statistics reported a total of 88,000 members of the *Iglesia*. A former minister who had access to the records and who used to compile the records and important papers of the church revealed that the maximum yearly converts as of 1950 was 15,000 and the minimum was 10,000. Placing the monthly average of converts at 1,200, gives us an average of 14,400 a year. In six years, the total would be 86,400 converts plus the original 88,000, making a

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<sup>1</sup> Estimate of a former minister.

<sup>2</sup> Locsin, Teodoro M. "Felix Manalo," *The Philippines Free Press*, Vol. XLI, No. 6, (Feb. 11, 1950).

grand total of 174,400 members. These members are only the mature ones—those who understand the teachings of the church. How about the children below fourteen years old? Taking into consideration the expelled members, a very insignificant number compared to the number of converts, the approximate is still close to 200,000.

The *Iglesia* not only wins converts from Luzon and the Visayan provinces but also from Mindanao. The much wider field covered by the *Iglesia's* missionaries can also account for the increased yearly converts.

The estimates of the author may seem to be an unscholarly conclusion but it is the best under the present circumstance and the closest to the real size of the *Iglesia's* followers. An observation of their baptismal rites which take place every other Saturday will in a way confirm the general estimates of *Iglesia* members made by the author. There never was a time in my numerous observations that the ministers baptized less than forty on one Saturday. There was even a record crowd of nearly 200 new converts in one baptismal rite. This is in Manila alone. About the new converts from the provinces one can only surmise.

**Open Forums.** The reader may wonder how the *Iglesia Ni Kristo* acquires so many members in a month. There are many answers to this question. The officers of local units, the deacons and their assistants, who spearhead the indoctrination and conversion of future members truly and sincerely love their work. They do not receive any salary. They do their mission work out of their love for God and their fellowmen. They do their work with the belief that eternal salvation will be theirs when the day of judgment comes.

Open forums are held every night by the *Iglesia*. The appointed time usually is eight o'clock in the evening at a designated chapel. The presiding officer is always a minister. There may be one or more ministers depending on the occasion or the demand of the place where the open forum is held. The forums are always opened with a prayer invoking God to help the ministers in their work of enlightening the people, and to help them open their hearts and minds to the church of Christ.

After the short prayer the presiding minister begins the sermon which may last for almost an hour or less depending on the topic under discussion. After the minister has spoken, anyone among the crowd can ask questions by writing them on a piece of paper. The written questions are given to the deacons and deaconesses who must always be present in all activities of the church. The written questions are in turn forwarded to the assisting minister.

The minister tries to answer all these questions basing his answer on the Bible, which he always carries with him for such an occasion. The Bible quotations are followed by a brief explanation. The minister always drives his point home by the use of the interrogative, "why, when, who and where," and answering these questions himself. In doing so he makes his point obviously clear and simple—so simple indeed that the ordinary unschooled man can easily understand it.

As is true in many Christian countries, very few Filipinos take the trouble of reading and studying the Bible; they know little of its contents. This is especially true among uneducated Catholics who have limited

knowledge of the fundamental doctrines and dogmas of their church. Ask them why they do this or why they believe in that doctrine or rule, and in nine cases out of ten they can not give a satisfactory answer.

When members of this group, which constitute a significant proportion of the Filipino population, happen to listen to this kind of open forum they often attend subsequent and similar meetings. The main target of the ministers of the *Iglesia* are the doctrines, practices and beliefs of the Catholic church. So far they have had a considerable success, and the extent of this success can be seen in the remarkable increase of their members and the outward display of the material wealth of the *Iglesia*.

The people who attend these forums do not necessarily go there by chance. They are induced to attend through the constant, sincere and zealous urging of the officers of the local units, the deacons, and their assistants.

Local forums that are held in Tondo usually record the greatest attendance among local forums. The spacious chapel at Tayuman is always filled to capacity, and many patiently stand outside the chapel to hear and see the proceedings of the meeting. The majority of those who attend have never seen nor read the Bible, so it is obviously easy for them to accept everything that is presented to them, especially when the minister reads the Biblical verses in order to prove his point. The minister does not use one Bible alone. He has with him all versions of the Bible, history books and even dictionaries which come in handy in proving his contentions in favor of the *Iglesia Ni Kristo*.

The lack of sufficient knowledge of the precepts and teachings of the Bible and the Catholic church is the most vulnerable spot in the religious life of an uneducated Catholic Filipino. Faith established on a belief which one knows so little about is a very weak foundation.

Another is the increase of the unemployed population. The unemployed have nothing to occupy their minds after regular meals. They try to find a place to forget their worries and to while away their time. Attending the *Iglesia's* open forums does not cost them anything. They go and listen to what is expounded, and their interest is aroused. Once their interest is aroused the officers and even members diplomatically but relentlessly push through their mission work until finally the subjects are converted.

The foregoing material thus shows that among the factors which aid the conversion work of the *Iglesia* are ignorance, particularly of the Bible, and unemployment. People who are experiencing these handicaps are apparently won over by the thought that if they do not find relief and solace in this life at least they will find peace, happiness and contentment in a second life which is promised to all faithful members of the *Iglesia*.

However, it would be a mistake to believe that only the poor and uneducated are converted by the *Iglesia*. Even the schooled members of the middle class are sometimes persuaded to join the sect. Listening to the ministers expound on their beliefs and doctrines with the aid of any version of the Bible which they know by heart, the author her-

self, on several occasions was fascinated by their expert knowledge of the subject. Frankly there were moments when the author was tempted to join the sect. Thus one can see the power of attraction which the *Iglesia* possesses for all types of people. In addition one is impressed by the close parallel between these conversion activities and those of the early Christian church.

**Religious Rallies.** Religious rallies are resorted to by the *Iglesia* frequently. Rallies are held if and when the members of the *Iglesia* in any town, city, district or province request them from the Executive Minister. The Supreme Brother through his assistants will make the necessary arrangements with the government officials concerned. After the necessary permits are granted, the scheduled rallies will be announced in all chapels to notify the members of the forthcoming event. In districts or provinces where the *Iglesia* helped the government officials win the election, the *Iglesia* is always sure of obtaining permits to hold rallies.

In these rallies the best ministers are selected to speak. Members from other provinces who are interested in joining the rally pay for their own expenses. The place of the rally is always attractively decorated and microphones are installed at all corners. In almost all cases the rallies coincide with town fiestas and big or special celebrations and affairs in the town, province or city. This is a procedure they have adopted in order to attract more people during the rally.

✓ During town fiestas, people from all walks of life and even from remote barrios come to town. Most of them come to town only once or twice a year, so they welcome anything with which they may enjoy themselves for a change. The attractively decorated stage and the eloquent voice of the well-dressed ministers whose speech is always delivered in the native dialect usually attract their attention. They will try to listen. Then questions are asked and a debate ensues between a member of the crowd and the minister who opens the Bible and reads verses as his authority. This is indeed a wonderful sight for the common *tao* to behold.

The common *tao* respects intelligence and education. He feels honored to see a fellow Filipino well-versed in interpreting the Bible, particularly since he had always thought that the interpretation and study of the Bible belonged to the clergy alone. Once the people's curiosity is aroused, the officers of local units, the deacons, their assistants and also the ministers seize the first opportunity to talk to them. Their curiosity is further aroused if they hear of the fundamental doctrine of the *Iglesia* which tries to prove that Manalo, a Filipino like themselves, is the angel of salvation. Eager to learn more they will ask questions, and the members who are equally eager to convert them will patiently explain to them, invite them to their nightly gatherings, open forums, rallies, and services. And before the men know it, they are already full-fledged members.

**The Increase of Literacy Among Its Members.** When the *Iglesia* was first established almost all or 99% of its followers were illiterate except the ministers whose abiding specialty is knowledge of the Bible. However, with the growth of the Philippine school system there is a



growing educated generation who are induced by their parents to embrace the teachings of the *Iglesia*.

The ministers consider it a feat to win converts from the grade school, because the new comers have the benefit of elementary education. Some of these elementary pupils are able to go to high school. The elementary and high school graduates, few as they were, gradually spread out to win more converts having the same educational attainment.

These ambitious groups among the *Iglesia* members began to send their children to finish the secondary course and some are even college students now. The end of World War II saw an increased monetary circulation, and parents were eager to invest their money in the education of their children who were naturally eager to study in order to make up for the time lost during the war. Among this group were members of the *Iglesia* and before long the church had lawyers, doctors, teachers and other professionals as members. With the increase of educational attainment of the members and ministers they tried their luck at winning converts among the educated groups.

It is not therefore, surprising to note that the rate of literacy among *Iglesia* members increased from 1% to 35%. It is indeed a tedious and slow process of improving one's organization, but the *Iglesia* has progressed steadily and the years to come may even show a faster increase of literacy among them.

**The Increase of Ministers.** The increase of members also indicates an increase among the ranks of the ministers. While there were only twenty-three registered ministers during the Commonwealth period, now the *Iglesia* has 114 registered.<sup>3</sup> The number of ordained but unregistered ministers rose from 200 to 2,000. For the present, the *Iglesia* has made it a point to ordain only those who have at least finished high school unless of course the candidate for ordination is exceptionally intelligent.

## NORM OF DISCIPLINE

### Prescribed Behavior

The members of the *Iglesia* are by training cautious and suspicious of anyone even of their own group, and especially more so if you ask one question too many. Further inquiry about this attitude showed that the members are constantly reminded by the deacons and ministers to be cautious in answering questions and in talking to curious "outsiders." In fact when the author decided to use drawings to illustrate some of their sacred rites she hired a member of the *Iglesia* to make the illustrations. To her surprise this *Iglesia* member refused to draw any picture unless the Secretary General or the Division Minister of Manila gave him the permission to draw the necessary pictures for her. He had to have that permit otherwise he would be reprimanded and this would be a blot in his record as an *Iglesia Ni Kristo* member. Such caution on their part would naturally arouse the curiosity of "outsiders" who are

<sup>3</sup> Accurate lists of registered ministers before the war were burned with the exception of 1933. Accurate lists of unregistered ministers are unavailable.

apt to exaggerate what little information they have gathered about the *Iglesia*.

It is difficult for anyone outside the *Iglesia* to understand such behavior. They being of a minority group, who have suffered ridicule, embarrassment and even physical injuries at the hands of members of other groups, the Catholics in particular,<sup>4</sup> have had the tendency to erect an invisible wall against such predicaments. Caution is one of the parts of this wall, their political activities are another and at times they also resort to violence.<sup>5</sup>

The members are nice and courteous people, human beings like you and me, but they are above all members of the *Iglesia* and therefore must obey rules and precautionary measures established by their institution. There is nothing unique about their rules of courtship, marriage, education and employment, but because of the fantastic and at times silly questions and rumors the author has heard she thought it important to analyze these topics.

**Courtship.** Perhaps the only unique quality in their rules of courtship, marriage, education and all other phases of their daily lives is that the *Iglesia* enters into all these phases of their daily existence to make sure they are living within the laws and requirements of the Church which they claim are also the laws of the Bible.

The *Iglesia* members, like all other people, recognize courtship as a usual prelude to marriage. They do not have prescribed rules during the courtship period, but they believe that men and women in this stage of their development should behave within certain bounds of decency. They do not believe in whirlwind courtships, and are always reminded to be as conservative as possible in love making. They should always consult their parents and elders. Of course in a large group like this there are always those who think otherwise. They are allowed to follow modern ways of courtship, such as unchaperoned "dates" but the deacons and local unit officials are all eyes and ears to be sure that the parties involved do not go beyond the bounds of human decency. And if they do and are discovered they are given advice and also reprimanded. In cases like this, the courtship period is shortened on the advice of the ministers, parents and deacons. Strict surveillance on the part of the deacons and local unit officials has in many ways minimized embarrassing situations.

A widower or widow is entitled to another courtship period. And if this ever happens and if the parties concerned have some problems with their obstinate and selfish children, they can always rely upon and look up to the deacons and ministers for guidance and an early and amicable solution to their problems.

**Marriage.** Like all Christians, the *Iglesia* members recognize marriage as a sacred institution. They believe in a lasting and happy marriage and therefore take pains in guiding the members in the wise

<sup>4</sup> *The Manila Times*, October 1, 1951; December 30, 1952; and June 26, 1953; also *The Daily Mirror*, December 30, 1952.

<sup>5</sup> *The Daily Mirror*, August 15, 1953; August 12, 1953; and a *Philippine News Service Press Release*, August 10, 1949.

choice of life partners, which involves good character of both parties, reasonable earning capacity of the man and, above all, both must be members of the *Iglesia Ni Kristo*.

The *Iglesia* has a long-standing opposition to mixed marriage. If a member falls in love with a non-member he must seek aid to help him win the girl over to the church. If she is converted the man is free to marry her and that will mean a good record for him. But if he fails to convert her, and his love for her is stronger than his faith in the *Iglesia*, and finally decides to marry her in a ceremony performed by another church against the advice of his deacon and ministers, this erring member is automatically expelled.

The *Iglesia* recognizes no marriages outside its church except civil marriages, and then only if to protect the civil rights of the parties concerned. If an erring member, such as I have just cited, marries through a civil ceremony, the man concerned is given three months in which to convert the girl. Failure to do so would mean either leaving the girl or the *Iglesia*.

Some have sought the help of Mr. Manalo in the choice of a life partner. He, being considered as God's messenger, cannot make a mistake. So his help has been invariably sought, especially by those who want to get married but cannot make up their minds as to whom to choose, or by those who for one reason or another are without sweethearts. Manalo, who always wants to help members in trouble or in need of guidance and counselling, has willingly assisted these seemingly bewildered members.

The practice is for the men and women to go to him and confide their problems. For those who do not have any sweetheart, Manalo would carefully deliberate on the qualifications of other applicants of the opposite sex with the same problem. He makes the selection and introduces one to the other. If both parties agree to be married sometime after their acquaintance they can do so. Many a happy marriage has resulted from Manalo's help and prudent guidance. He has to be very careful in his selection so as not to fail the expectation of the members. At the same time the role of Manalo in the couple's meeting makes the couple sincerely believe that they are somehow unique because it was through him that they met and they have his personal blessings. This attitude of the couple helps them to make their marriage a happy, lasting and fruitful one.

Immorality is taboo among the *Iglesia* members. Such cases are immediately referred to the deacons and ministers. If ministers are the offenders the case is at once reported to Mr. Manalo.

**Employment.** There is nothing peculiar about *Iglesia* members being employed in public or private offices and about their desire to seek employment. Looking for a job and seeking somebody else's help in doing so is not unusual because the instinct of self-preservation is common to all men. The popular idea that jobless members are enticed to stay within the fold of the *Iglesia* because the Church furnishes them with a small capital to help them start their own business is baseless and ridiculous. The unemployed members remain with the *Iglesia*, not

because they are given material rewards, but because they love to stay; besides they firmly believe that in some ways their faith and belief in the teachings of the *Iglesia* will some day help them land a job.

Manalo has always discouraged members from asking recommendations from him. But in some cases he recommends members whom he knows are capable and deserving. There is no denying, however, that there are quite a number of *Iglesia* members who have obtained jobs because they are members of the *Iglesia Ni Kristo*. In many instances when members ask for Manalo's recommendation, they are gently but firmly refused, but Manalo promises to offer special prayers for them and they are advised to pray and reaffirm a stronger faith and belief in the *Iglesia*. The author has heard of several such cases who subsequently secured good jobs. They attribute their success to their faith and belief, and of course to Manalo's prayers.

**Voting Unity and Political Influence.** The unity of the members behind Manalo is what amazes many outsiders. The *Iglesia* support has always been sought, even as early as Manuel Quezon's time, by political aspirants because of the voting unity of the members during election time. Their unity can be traced from a belief in and observance of a Biblical teaching which says that if they want to be noticed by the people they should always be one in all important decisions and activities. True enough they have gained sufficient notice from the politician's group. A man with almost a hundred thousand solid voters behind him must indeed be courted by the vote-hungry *politicos*.

The direct concern of Manalo in helping particular candidates win is not money, power or position for him or the members but "equal protection by the law." Contrary to malicious lies that the *Iglesia* sells the votes of the members, it has turned down and withdrawn support from any candidate who offered money or other material rewards. Such a practice, they say, is bribery which is an evil, pointing to Judas who was bribed to betray Jesus Christ.

The Philippines being a democratic country, the members of the *Iglesia* feel that they too should be allowed to hold their religious rallies. But they claim that there have been many times when they were denied permission by Catholic-supported candidates. If a permit was given, their rallies, in many instances, were disturbed by Catholics and other members of religious sects or these rallies were held far from the town proper. Very seldom, so they say, did the law enforcing agencies come to their rescue. This is what they call "unequal protection by the law." Apparently it is, if the version comes from them. But did the *Iglesia* ever ponder the situation?

Several witnesses to some disorderly rallies, Catholics and *Sabatistas* alike, noted one glaring fact — that all their speeches make direct attacks against the Catholics in particular. In retaliation the Catholics will in many cases ask questions that really embarrass the *Iglesia*, because of the provocation. If these embarrassing and at times personal questions are asked, the *Iglesia* members become angry and trouble begins. Naturally the party who starts the physical violence is arrested by the police. In many instances witnesses have claimed that the *Iglesia* was



physically and morally at fault, just as there have been instances when the Catholics were at fault, especially when, during rallies, debates have ended in defeat for the Catholics who thereupon resorted to violence.

Local cases like these have been settled but what has particularly angered the *Iglesia* has been their inability to obtain permits to hold rallies during the last few years. With their active participation in politics and the resulting victory of their candidates they can always be sure of obtaining the necessary permit to hold religious rallies and therefore facilitate the conversion of more people who are still in the "dark" waiting to be "saved" by the *Iglesia*.

Whenever elections are held, political leaders and aspirants flock to Manalo's office months before the big event and ask for his support. The members believe that Manalo alone should decide for whom they should vote, because he is divinely guided and therefore he alone would know who could help the people and the *Iglesia* in particular. He has made it known to his members that his criteria in selecting their candidates are the following:

- 1) Dictates of his conscience;
- 2) That the candidates are not enemies of the *Iglesia*;
- 3) That they are honest (at least from his judgment);
- 4) That their main concern is the people's welfare.

**Education.** The members who can afford to go to school are free to do so and can take up any course they want. Contrary to rumors that many members enroll in Catholic colleges, the *Iglesia* strongly prohibits its members from enrolling in Catholic colleges. Enrollment in these colleges would mean expulsion. Of course no true and sincere member violates this rule.

**Contributions.** Contributions among members are not obligatory. However, the ministers have continuously ingrained and infused in the minds and hearts of the members that men have been created by God, that God has showered them with favors and therefore men should repay God not only by worshipping and adoring Him but also by giving voluntarily a small part of the fruits of their labors. They have always been made to believe, in fact it is a part of their doctrine, that the more one gives the more favors one would receive from God. This is also the basis of adjusting the salaries of ministers. They sincerely believe that without God's help they can do nothing and so if they are blessed with a good means of livelihood they should share these blessings with God.

The collection of contributions and the offering of these contributions to God is one of the major parts of their religious services. Let us take the place of a true, sincere and firm believer of the teachings of the *Iglesia*. He gives when the deacon comes around, then he sees those collections placed in a big chest, hears the prayers of offering intoned by the head deacon. Naturally he feels proud and at the same time humble—proud because a part of that collection is his and humble because he can only give so little to such a holy cause. Such faith, such feeling and attitude enables the members, encourages them to give even if they have to sacrifice—for such a sacrifice, they believe, is holy and

will be rewarded. I have seen bare-footed and shabbily-dressed members attend the services, but they still give at least five centavos or maybe more. Not all have this kind of faith, for there are those who refuse to give even if they can afford. Such members can be indoctrinated further if they so want it. There are also those who have nothing at all to spare. However, the greater majority of the members try their best to give.

The *Iglesia* directly asks for contributions only if a local chapel badly needs some necessary equipment and this particular locality lacks funds.

**Recreation.** The *Iglesia* approves of all kinds of decent recreation and relaxation for its members. The most common are basketball, baseball, picnics, swimming and programs. Men are advised to stay away from pool rooms, races and bars, while women are discouraged from playing mahjong and other forms of gambling games. The biggest recreational activity of the *Iglesia* is a general program for a whole division once a year. Representatives and members from all over the division gather to witness the program, the main feature of which is a contest among all the localities in that district. General programs like this are usually attended by Mr. Eraño Manalo and the Secretary General. Mr. Felix Manalo himself attends if he is not physically indisposed. There are contests among the children and adults respectively. The competition may either be about their doctrines, or in games, plays, declamations, orations and songs. If the program is a whole day affair all these competitive games are included. Valuable prizes are awarded to the winners.

Members are allowed to attend parties but should avoid ballroom dancing which to them is indecent because without music the partners are practically embracing each other which looks awkward in public.

**Other Activities.** The closely knitted society and the systematic supervision of the local units make it possible for the *Iglesia* to recognize any wrongdoing of any member. Any false move or conversation unbecoming of an *Iglesia* member is at once reported by the local unit officials to the deacons who are the ears and eyes of the Church.

Parents who can not control or discipline their children can always ask help from the ministers and deacons. Husbands and wives who can not settle their differences amicably can always ask the deacons, ministers, and even the Executive Minister to help them settle their troubles.

If the members happen to be involved in trouble with the law and this trouble comes as a result of the performance of their duties to the church, the legal counsellors of the *Iglesia* take care of their cases. Many of these troubles stem from their rallies when the debates become so heated that someone uses brute force.

### Expulsion From the Iglesia

One reason why the *Iglesia* can rightly boast that there are no delinquents among them is the fact that if wayward members cannot be reformed they are expelled from the *Iglesia*.

**Settlement of Disputes.** No matter how seemingly insignificant domestic quarrels and personal problems are, the deacons and ministers always see to it that they are patched up and solved because it is from these small troubles that serious ones originate. The petty disobedience of a young man and a young woman may develop into something more serious if left uncorrected. The same is true with a husband and wife, for trouble, if left unresolved, may lead to an unhappy married life.

The *Iglesia* pays attention to every little thing and it requires a lot of patience, time, tact and courage from the deacons and ministers. It is the duty of local unit officials and even members to watch the behavior of co-members, and report anything irregular that they observe, see, or hear, to the deacons. Whatever the problems or troubles are, the deacons will try their best to resolve them. If after doing all they can for days and even weeks the problem has not yet been resolved, the case is turned over to the head deacon. If the head deacon succeeds, well and good, but if not he refers the case to the local minister, who in many former instances has settled domestic and other minor troubles. Nevertheless, there have been several stubborn and more serious cases that the division minister has had to take over. Failure of the division minister to resolve cases brought to him for settlement means that the case is grave enough to be brought to the attention of the Executive Minister. But as much as possible the ministers try to settle the troubles of their flock, which would ultimately reflect on their good management and devotion to duty.

If a minister is the offender the case is directly referred to the Executive Minister. Any member can go or write directly to Manila and report misbehavior of any minister. If deacons are the offenders their cases are referred to the local or division ministers.

**Causes of Expulsion.** Excommunication is to the Catholics as expulsion is to the *Iglesia*. Members of the Church who have committed any of the following crimes can be expelled:

- 1) Excessive drinking and gambling
- 2) Immorality
- 3) Marriage outside the church
- 4) Apostasy
- 5) Disagreement with the administrative policies
- 6) Did not vote for the candidate agreed upon.

As I already mentioned, petty and seemingly minor troubles and disputes may result in any of these grave offenses that may cause a member to be expelled. The *Iglesia*, however, believes that to err is human and to forgive is divine. Offenders who have shown sincere repentance for their sins and would like to be taken back by the *Iglesia* are given a second chance on condition that they would be more cautious and prudent in the future. If this second chance is violated, they are out, never more to be officially admitted.

Such strict regulations and surveillance can really make a person very cautious and suspicious indeed. The *Iglesia* discipline mildly resembles in some ways the communist discipline and surveillance of members, and in many ways it proves to be beneficial to the Church.